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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a comprehensive survey of 1400 recent graduates of 11 teacher preparation institutions and nearly 500 principals who supervise them in their new teaching jobs and discusses data concerning leadership and collegial sharing of knowledge. The discussion of results focuses on two parts of the survey questionnaire: graduates' perceptions of themselves as leaders or change agents in their schools, and an open-ended question on the graduates' perceptions of how they "stand out" from their teacher-peers. Analysis of responses suggests that: (1) graduates of the 11 institutions were less willing to describe themselves as leaders or change agents than were the principals with whom they work; (2) graduates who have been teaching for 4 or 5 years perceive themselves to be functioning as leaders more often than their counterparts who have been teaching for 1 to 3 years, but still reported a low incidence of what they considered leadership behavior; (3) informal leadership behaviors were reported more often than traditional teacher-leader roles; (4) graduates described themselves as "standing out" among their teacher peers because they loved, cared about, and related well to children, tried new ideas and strategies in the classroom, had excellent rapport with colleagues, parents, and administrators, and were enthusiastic about teaching. (LL)

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PERCEPTIONS OF RECENT GRADUATES: LEADERSHIP AND "STANDING OUT"

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Perceptions of Recent Graduates: Leadership and "Standing Out"

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, April, 1993.

Introduction

It is always the hope of those of us who prepare new teachers that we will provide our students with the latest pedagogical techniques while instilling within them an enthusiasm for teaching, a caring attitude toward children, and the professional knowledge, expertise and demeanor to do it all well. Many of us like to think that we graduate teachers who stand out among their peers as leaders or change agents or, at least, as purveyors of "new ways."

How are we doing?

Eleven teacher preparation institutions surveyed recent graduates and their principals concerning perceptions of their own (graduates') formal and informal leadership roles as new teachers, and whether or not they stood out among their teacher-peers. Such issues are explored in this paper using data gathered as part of the comprehensive Eleven-Institution Study of recent graduates coordinated by the University of New Hampshire. Included in the study are graduates of Austin College of Texas, Drake University, the University of Florida at Gainesville, the University of Kansas, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the University of New Hampshire, Oakland University of Michigan, Texas A&M University, the University of Virginia, the University of Rhode Island, and the University of Vermont. Approximately 1400 graduates (1985-1991) in elementary and secondary education and 481 principals who now supervise

them were surveyed on a variety of issues important to teacher education, including academic potential, type of teacher preparation program, employment profile, professional attitudes, and professional practice. (Andrew, 1992) A subset of the data concerning leadership and collegial sharing of knowledge is reported and discussed in this paper. Potentially related factors such as age and number of years in teaching (up to 5 years) are also explored. In addition, a content analysis was performed on an open-ended question asking graduates whether or not they stood out among other teachers in their schools, and, if so, how. The brief summary of results (below) is followed by a description of analytic techniques, a more detailed discussion of the results, and conclusions.

Summary of Results

Graduates of the eleven institutions were less willing to describe themselves as leaders or change agents than were the principals with whom they work. Graduates who have been teaching for four or five years perceived themselves to be functioning as leaders more often than their counterparts who have been teaching for one to three years. However, these four-five year "veterans" still reported a low incidence of leadership behavior. Age does not appear to be a related factor, even when combined with number of years in teaching (up to five years). Less formal leadership-type behaviors such as "shares expertise with colleagues" or "attempts to influence educational decisions in the school" were reported more often than more traditional teacher-leader roles such as "lead teacher on a team." More revealing were the graduates' descriptions of themselves as "standing out" among their teacher peers because they loved, cared about, and related well to children; tried new

ideas and strategies in the classroom; had excellent rapport with colleagues, parents, and administrators; and were enthusiastic about teaching.

Data Analysis

Data concerning graduates' perceptions reported in this paper are taken from responses to items 33 and 34 on the graduates' questionnaire which list a variety of possible leadership and professional roles. Data concerning principals' responses are taken from items 1, 2, 5, 6, and 10 of the principals' questionnaire which address leadership and professional characteristics of graduates. On both instruments, a 5-point Likert-type response scale was used. Descriptive data analysis includes frequencies in each response category. In this paper, the frequency of missing data is also reported. Frequency percentages are reported in terms of the *total sample* (including missing data) because inspection of the questionnaires indicated that a number of respondents answered only self-selected questions, thus raising the possibility that a non-response could be construed as "never" or "not at all." Simple t-tests were performed to determine whether or not there was a significant difference in the response means for those teaching 1-3 years versus those teaching for 4-5 years. **[age here]** Results are described in Part One of the Discussion of Results.

Over 871 graduates, 62% of those responding to the questionnaire, answered "yes" to item 35: "Do you feel that you stand out in any way among teachers at your school ?" and completed the remainder of the item: "If yes, please list two or three skills, deficiencies, attitudes or abilities which make you stand out." Almost all of those who reported that they "stood out" described themselves in positive terms. A content analysis was performed by one of the authors yielding thirteen initial, distinct categories and two more general categories: (1) enthusiastic/eager/positive attitude; (2) takes risks or chances; (3) tries new things/is innovative; (4) is creative; (5) is flexible/adaptable; (6) loves/cares about/responds-relates well to children; (7) has good rapport with/relates well

to colleagues/parents/administrators/community members; (8) is professional; (9) has superior knowledge/education; (10) uses specific strategies (recorded); (11) has organizational skills; (12) employs a variety in the classroom; (13) uses effective (or – ineffective) discipline.....(14) displays leadership (recorded); (15) other (recorded). These categories were determined on the basis of precise wording used in the responses. For example, if the response said "enthusiastic," the instance was noted in category 1. If the response said "I feel genuine concern and it comes across to the students. I've been able to reach a few most can't reach (though I miss many)," the instance was recorded in category 6. Categories 2,3,4, and 5 were collapsed into one category: Innovative/Creative/Flexible. Frequencies of the strategies recorded in category 10 were determined and are reported below in Part Two of the Discussion of Results section. Inspection of general categories 14 and 15 yielded additional categories such as "coach/sponsor" (from category 14) and "pursues continuing education" (from category 15). Frequencies of responses in these and all other categories are given in Part Two of the Discussion of Results section, arranged under the following headings: (1) Personal Characteristics and Attitudes (2) Teaching Practice (3) Professional Development and Leadership. Frequencies of instances (incidence) of a particular response-type are reported within each category. Thus, one subject's narrative response was parsed into response-types, and each of those was categorized. Note that one subject may have responses in a number of different categories (generally not more than two or three). Percentages are reported in two ways: (1) the incidence of a particular categorized response-type per total number who answered the questionnaire. This total includes those who may not have answered or may have said "no" to item 35 as well as those who answered the item in narrative form, and (2) the incidence of a particular categorized response-type per total number who responded in narrative form to item 35. While frequencies are reported for all categories, discussion centers on response-types that

showed up most frequently in the narratives. As might be expected, institutional profiles vary somewhat, and these are also reported without naming specific institutions.

Addressed in Part One of the Discussion of Results section of this paper are perceptions of graduates as leaders or change agents based on the Likert-type item responses given by graduates and principals. Confirming data from the open-ended question are discussed where appropriate. Part Two focuses on respondents' descriptions of themselves offered in the open-ended item, 35, and categorized as described above.

Discussion of Results

PART ONE

Perception of Graduates as Leaders or Change Agents in their Schools

Graduates were asked to rank themselves on a 5-point Likert-type scale as to how often they functioned in a particular leadership position or professional role: 1= Never, 2= Rarely, 3= Sometimes, 4= Often, 5= Always. The table below contains the percentage of responses in each category:

Table One: Percentage of graduates ranking their own leadership and professional activities on a 5-point scale

Descriptor	Blank	1 Never	2 Rarely	3 Sometimes	4 Often	5 Always
Share expertise with other teachers.	15.5 %	1.9 %	5.8 %	27.2 %	36.6 %	13.1 %
Collaborates with others to implement programs	16.3 %	5.5 %	11.2 %	27.6 %	28.6 %	10.8 %
Arranges to attend professional conferences	15.0 %	5.7 %	8.6 %	33.2 %	30.9 %	6.6 %
Attempts to influence educational decisions in your school	16.8 %	7.8 %	11.7 %	31.5 %	25.8 %	6.5 %
Shares new knowledge with colleagues at faculty meetings.	16.5 %	10.8 %	14.2 %	23.3 %	22.7 %	12.4 %
Challenges rules	18.2 %	9.4 %	20.9 %	31.3 %	14.9 %	5.3 %
Takes professional leadership positions beyond the school	17.7 %	23.6 %	21.2 %	19.1 %	12.7 %	5.5 %
Curriculum developer	17.6 %	27.9 %	12.9 %	22.6 %	13.8 %	5.3 %
Attempts to influence educational decisions in your district	17.8 %	20.7 %	25.4 %	21.8 %	11.9 %	2.4 %
Cooperating teacher	18.8 %	37.0 %	8.4 %	18.3 %	11.9 %	5.5 %
Teachers' union rep.	19.5 %	71.9 %	2.6 %	1.9 %	2.3 %	1.7 %
Lead Teacher on a team	17.8 %	31.8 %	16.5 %	19.9 %	11.2 %	2.7 %
Researcher	18.6 %	39.2 %	13.5 %	16.5 %	9.3 %	3.7 %
Committee head	17.7 %	38.6 %	25.9 %	18.3 %	8.6 %	.8 %
Curriculum coordinator	19.0 %	46.3 %	10.0 %	15.5 %	6.9 %	2.3 %
Peer supervisor	18.3 %	50.6 %	12.4 %	9.9 %	7.1 %	1.7 %
Workshop presenter	18.3 %	50.9 %	12.6 %	14.2 %	3.5 %	.6 %
Beginning teacher mentor	19.1 %	62.4 %	5.4 %	8.8 %	3.3 %	2.0 %
Department head	19.5 %	64.8 %	6.0 %	3.4 %	2.2 %	4.1 %

Over 75% of the graduates report that they sometimes, often, or always share their expertise with other teachers. Two-thirds or more report that they sometimes, often or always collaborate with others to implement programs and arrange to attend professional meetings. These behaviors are consistent with graduates' perceptions of how they stand out among their teacher peers. In the open-ended question, many described themselves as "sharing ideas with others," serving as committee members, or pursuing continuing education. A related personal characteristic was "Ability to relate to other adults" (colleagues, administrators, parents, and community members). Half or more of the graduates report that they sometimes, often or always "challenge the rules" when a professional matter is at stake or "attempt to influence educational decisions" in their schools (See table 1). While these may not be traditional leadership roles, it is clear that these new teachers are assuming and modeling professional responsibilities that go beyond the stereotype of the teacher in her classroom with the door closed. Less than a quarter of the graduates describe themselves as functioning in the traditional teacher-leader positions of curriculum coordinator, peer supervisor, beginning teacher mentor, committee head, department head, or workshop presenter. These results are also consistent with responses to the open-ended question. Of the 871 graduates who described why they stood out among their peers, only six reported that they held a traditional leadership position (department chair, principal, lead teacher, union vice president). Only a few felt they stood out as "rebels" or had a "strong voice," suggesting that those who "challenge the rules" might be working with colleagues who do the same.

Simple t-tests indicate that graduates who have been teaching 4-5 years are more likely to report that they are engaged in traditional teacher-

leader behaviors than are graduates who have been teaching 1-3 years: lead teacher on a team ($x = 2.5$, $p<.01$), committee head ($x = 2.3$, $p<.01$), curriculum developer ($x=2.8$, $p<.01$), peer supervisor ($x = 1.9$, $p<.01$), department head ($x=1.7$, $p<.01$), workshop presenter ($x=1.9$, $p<.01$), beginning teacher mentor ($x=1.8$, $p<.01$), union representative ($x=1.4$, $p<.01$), and curriculum coordinator ($x=2.2$, $p<.01$).* Although those who have been teaching longer are more likely to be engaged in these traditional teacher-leader or high-status positions, such engagement is still infrequent. This is not surprising, since longevity in position is a likely criterion for formal recognition or appointment, particularly in the case of peer leadership. As noted above, more frequent engagement is seen in other professional aspects of teaching having to do with sharing of knowledge, influencing decision-making, etc. Here, too, graduates who have been teaching 4-5 years are more likely to be engaged in such activity than are their counterparts who have been teaching 1-3 years.

Principals' perceptions generally agree with those of the graduates. They rate graduates (in comparison to other new teachers) as "high" or "very high" on their ability to: cooperate in planning curriculum (84%); communicate (83%); and relate to parents (72 %). Unlike the graduates, more than half of the principals offer high and very high marks for specific leadership abilities: Leadership in curriculum development (66%); leadership in staff development (63%); leadership among peers (65%); and functioning as a "change agent" (71%). Even "Leadership Beyond School" is ranked as medium, high, or very high by 81% of the principals.

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* Reported means are for the 4-5 year teachers.

Table Two: Percentage of principals ranking graduates' leadership and professional activities on a 5-point scale

Characteristic	Blank	1 Very Low	2 Low	3 Middle	4 High	5 Very High	N
Communication skills	0	0.2%	1.5%	15.6%	44.7 %	38.0%	481
Change Agent	2.3%	0.8%	2.7%	23.1%	43.0%	28.1%	470
Leadership in curriculum develop.	2.3%	1.2%	3.7%	26.6%	40.1%	26.0%	470
Leadership in staff development	3.3%	1.7%	5.6%	32.2%	35.6%	21.6%	472
Relations with parents	1.2%	0.4%	1.7%	14.8%	27.8%	44.1%	475
Cooperates in planning curriculum	0.2	0.4%	2.7%	12.9%	39.7%	44.1%	480
Leadership beyond school	9.6	1.7%	8.1%	29.7%	29.3%	21.6%	435
Leadership among peers	0.2	0.4%	5.0%	28.5%	34.5%	30.6%	476

In summary, our graduates feel that they stand out among other teachers at their schools because, among other things, they assume professional responsibilities above and beyond classroom teaching. Principals see this also, but are more likely to describe these professional activities as "leadership" behaviors than are the graduates. Graduates rarely reported that they functioned in the traditional teacher-leader or high-status positions listed on the questionnaire, although those who have been teaching 4-5 years reported a slightly but significantly higher frequency than did their counterparts who have been teaching 1-3 years. Only a handful of graduates actually described themselves as "leaders" in the open-ended question while a large number volunteered that they engaged in professional activities that made them stand out from other teachers in their schools. These are reported in more detail below in Part Two.

Part Two

Graduates' perceptions of how they "stand out" from their teacher-peers

Item 35 on the graduates' questionnaire asks:
Do you feel that you stand out in any way among teachers at your school?

yes _____ no _____.

If yes, please list two or three skills, deficiencies, attitudes or abilities which make you stand out.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Eight hundred seventy-one of the graduates answered "yes" and responded to the second part of the question in narrative form. Frequencies of response-types are given below within the categories to which they were assigned and under the broad headings of Personal Characteristics/Attitudes, Professional Development and Leadership, and Practice Approaches. Frequencies refer to numbers of incidences within the narratives. Occasional synonymous phrases in a single narrative such as "I try new things in the classroom, and I use innovative techniques during my class " were recorded as one incident. "Percentages" headed by a column marked Q refer to number of incidents per all graduates who responded to the questionnaire (N=1397) whether or not they answered item 35. The column headed by Q35 refers to the frequency of incidents per all graduates who responded to the questionnaire and wrote a narrative response to item 35 (n=871). A number of responses were assigned to a particular heading but did not fit into any category and are reported as "other" at the end of the tables.

Table three: Personal Characteristics/Attitudes of Graduates

Category	Frequency	%Q35	%Q
loves/cares about/responds-relates well to children	229	26%	16%
Is innovative/creative/flexible	224	26%	16%
enthusiastic/eager/positive attitude	190	22%	14%
has good rapport with/relates well to colleagues/parents/administrators/community members	163	19%	12%
is confident/independent	31	3.6%	2.2%
is well-organized	30	3.4%	2.1%
is patient	22		
is too young/inexperienced	15		
sets higher standards is open-minded has a sense of humor	mentioned infrequently		
(other)	26		

Table Four: Professional Characteristics of Graduates

Category	Frequency	%Q35	%Q
has strong content knowledge/education	76	8.7%	5.4%
is a hard worker	55	6.3%	3.9%
shares ideas with colleagues	53	6.1%	3.8%
continues education	42	4.8%	3.0%
coaches/sponsors school activities	40	4.6%	2.9%
serves on committees	37	4.2%	2.6%
is more professional	35	4.1%	2.5%
curriculum development whole staff is great has received awards	mentioned infrequently		
(other)	38		

Table Five: Practice Approaches

Category	Frequency	%Q35	%Q
discipline	64 (+ 4 neg.)	7.3%	4.6%
reading-writing process/whole language literature-based teaching	52	5.9%	3.7%
"hands-on" teaching	39	4.5%	3.0%
a "variety" of approaches (not named by respondent)	30	3.4%	2.1%
computer usage	19	2.2%	1.4%
problem-solving/critical thinking	16	1.8%	1.0%
project-based/integrated/thematic	16	1.8%	1.0%
cooperative learning	14	1.6%	1.0%
presentation/lecturing individualized instruction student-centered instruction questioning techniques	mentioned infrequently		
(other)	26	3.0%	1.9%

Graduates most often reported that they stood out among other teachers in their school because of their personal characteristics and attitudes toward their profession. Four characteristics/attitudes stand out above all other response-types: These graduates love working with children (229 instances). They try new things in the classroom (224). They are enthusiastic, motivated to do a good job (190). They have a good rapport with other adults including peers, administrators, parents, and community members (163). In the area of professional characteristics, they most often cite their strong knowledge base and educational background (76). They work hard (55), share ideas with colleagues (53), and keep abreast of new developments in their fields by attending workshops, enrolling in courses (42), and, in two cases, pursuing a doctorate. They are involved in school activities as coaches and sponsors of after-school programs (40), serve on committees more often than their peers (37), and generally feel that they stand out because they are

"more professional" than many of their colleagues (35). Principals agree with the graduates. They place 83% in the top half of teachers with whom they had worked, and place 56% in the top quartile. (Andrew, 1992) They further reported excellence in enthusiasm for teaching, trying new ideas, using a variety of instructional skills, knowledge of subject matter, and seeking and using feedback. On an open-ended question asking principals to identify strengths and weakness of our graduates, they frequently cited outstanding interpersonal skills (39 instances), a growth-oriented improvement attitude (35), enthusiasm ( ), the taking of leadership roles (25), creativity (19), cooperativeness (17), and a caring and compassionate attitude toward children (14). Frequently cited professional behaviors included professional attitude, organizational skills, and excellence with extracurricular activities. (Ibid.)

A large proportion of the graduates (about 20%) described themselves as "standing out" among their peers because of the teaching methods they use in the classroom. Many were quite specific, for example, "knowledge of whole language writing, creative use of big books, literature based instruction." Other methods/strategies/approaches/emphases include hands-on (39), computer usage (19), problem-solving/critical thinking (16), project-based/integrated/thematic (16), and cooperative learning (14). Sixty-four graduates volunteered that they stood out because they did a good job with discipline. Four, however, felt that they did not handle discipline problems as well as their colleagues.

Graduates generally felt confident, excited, and saw their contributions as positive and well-received by their colleagues. A number mentioned that they were the youngest in their school, and some (15) felt that it was too soon to ask whether or not they stood out from their peers. One recent graduate wrote: "Ask me again in November!"

The authors would be remiss in not reporting a disturbing tone that frequently showed up in the narratives. Many graduates felt that they stood out from their colleagues because their colleagues were less involved or less caring than they ought to

be. One graduate typifies that tone: "I really care if the kids are learning or not. A lot of the teachers I work with just want to get through the year and do not truly respect the kids as capable learners." Another wrote, more mildly: "I am the youngest on the staff. I have a lot of new ideas, some like to know about them, others don't." A few held the opposite view of their colleagues: "It's hard to stand out in my school because I am still so new and there are so many incredible teachers there."

[We will likely include some anonymous "institutional profiles" of response types in the oral presentation, but these were not ready in time to be included in the paper. We may also include some interview data.]

Conclusion

A comprehensive survey of 1400 recent graduates of eleven teacher preparation institutions and nearly 500 principals who supervise them in their new teaching jobs report that the graduates possess outstanding personal characteristics, enthusiastically undertake professional responsibilities, try new things in the classroom, care about students, and have an excellent command of subject matter. Graduates show some concern about being "new" in their schools and seeing older teachers who may be "burning out," but they report great enthusiasm for the profession, and an excellent grasp and apparent translation into practice of the important issues. They are above the norm. They stand out. This is good news for America's children!

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